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Other Men's Labour.

A SERMON ON THE DEATH OF THE REV. E. B. PUSEY, D.D.

PREACHED AT

ST. GILES' CHURCH, OXFORD,

On the Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity,

SEPTEMBER 24, 1882,

BY THE

REV. R. ST. JOHN TYRWHITT, M.A.

FORMERLY SENIOR STUDENT AND RHETORIC READER
OF CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD.

Parker and Co.

OXFORD, AND 6 SOUTHAMPTON-STREET,
STRAND, LONDON.



From the Author.



A Sermon, &c.

ST. JOHN iv. 38.

Other men laboured, and ye are entered into their labours.

THE past week will always be memorable in this City and University, because it has witnessed the burial of the first and chief Doctor of the Church of Christ in England. Churches have their higher and lower officers ; some more, some less, in contact with the State, with all the powers that be, with committees of partly secular business, with education in all its branches, with the temporal life of the poor, with which ministering clergy are largely concerned. We have our archbishops and bishops employed with great people and things as well as the apparently small ones ; and we have priests and deacons for prayer and Sacramental service, for exhortation and catechizing, for visitation and almsgiving. We have also, and we certainly require, doctors learned in all book-authority, trained in religious discussion, accustomed to intellectual labour of the highest kind, knowing the spiritual difficulties of the age, zealous to maintain and hand down for the people the Faith in Christ, once for all delivered to

the Saints. Without such men the landmarks of the Faith would be lost, the Creeds would be gradually, or indeed swiftly, explained away, made matter of choice, feeling, or taste,—and in fact erased altogether.

The tendency of the modern world, that is to say the will, wish, and inclination of the world, is to believe nothing, or as little as possible. It may be that with God's blessing, and the faithful labours of such men as he who is just departed, a coming generation may be more willing to seek its own peace, and embrace and rest in the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. We or our children may return to what is called an age of faith. But at all events that will be a very different time, when it comes, from earlier ages of faith, which were ages of passive ignorance for the people. And one of our dangerous ways of thinking is the vague persuasion that one cannot have faith unless one happen to live in an age of faith. It is settled that this is an age of enquiry and scepticism and so on: and most of us observe with regret a great tendency towards scepticism in order to be with the age, and in the fashion, and to talk like other people; or rather in order to talk like some clever person to whom other people seem to listen.

Now the great end of this great life which is just over was to appeal, as with steady word of command and cheering guidance, to every Christian man and woman to stand fast in the faith per-

sonally ; to quit themselves like men in the midst of all that din of clever persons, which confuses thought, and darkens counsel all over the land. One was always at hand, it was felt, whose learning could meet all speculative difficulty as a Christian man should meet it ; whose sincerity pointed out where difficulty lay ; whose acuteness and sympathy enabled him to understand other people's difficulties ; and who could indeed help, as theologian and as casuist. Enough has not been said of his life-long labour on the foundations of the faith ; nor will all ever be known in this world of his strife with the individual spirit ; of his care for souls in whom faith was failing, or who were tainted with sin, and therefore (as always happens) weary and double-minded in belief. In writings and discourses meant for the world, and in counsel given to the few, we had one with us who would set our battle in array and bid us be of good courage. Thus it always was ; and this enabled Dr. Pusey to do so very much, as he certainly did (the expression may be allowed), in holding the Church of England together. All parties who really believed the Apostles' Creed knew in their hearts that he strengthened their belief. He was a defence and support to many Christians not calling themselves members of the Church of England. The shock of any failure on his part would have been felt far beyond the visible and supposed boundaries of the Church of England. In one sense that ex-

pression means all Christian souls in England. And had he failed, who never failed that man knows of; had his faithfulness to the Church of Christ, as established in these realms, been less, one can only say it would have been a very serious blow to it, and to other Reformed Churches. Had the example, the pressure and varied conjurations of his friends led him to join the Roman Communion, it would have been a question whether a majority of the most earnest men in our own Church would not have followed him; and whether those who were left behind would not have lost their hold of the whole Sacramental system of the Church, and dropped their visible connection with the Visible and Catholic Church on earth. In any case, the practical helplessness of that remnant would probably by this time have led to disestablishment and secularization, which were a political threat of fifty years ago, and seemed more likely to happen then than they do now.

I think there will not be many here now who would not be vexed and alarmed to think that the Church of England was *not* a true and living branch of the Catholic Church. But fifty years ago that expression would have been misunderstood and disliked. Nobody then cared or thought much about the Church Catholic or Universal. When you said Catholic Church you did not mean Universal Church, you meant Roman Catholic, or exclusive and

condemnatory Church. The use of the word Catholic or Universal here in Oxford, and throughout England and the English world, the acknowledgment of One Church of believers with Christ the Lord at its Head, may be taken as a measure of the importance of the teaching which has borne the name of this our English Doctor. The Sacramental rites and teaching, so fully renewed and reinforced of late years; all right reverence and adoration in Holy Communion; the hope of the state of grace and childhood in God, begun by every Christian child in Baptism; personal religion, and devotion of the individual soul to God in Christ; all activity and self-sacrifice in His Name: all this closely adheres to, or coheres with, and follows as a necessary consequence from, the great Article of Belief in the Holy Catholic Church. All charity to our neighbour as a Christian; all feeling for our enemy as one for whom Christ died; all hope for those who are separated from us, and those whom we know not: all leans on this central doctrine that we are all one body in Christ. The last forty years have revived that doctrine; but I think that I myself can remember, or bear some kind of witness, that forty or fifty years ago these thoughts were little regarded by the people, and imperfectly insisted on by clergy in the pulpit; perhaps not very well or generally illustrated by labour of charity and good works.

It is by no means an exaltation of ourselves, or of our own zeal, or our own knowledge, or our own organizations, to consider with earnest thankfulness what has been done for us, and think of men who have been great instruments for good. We do not imitate the Pharisee in thanking God that we are not as other men are, if we thank Him that we are better off than others, for that He has raised up good and faithful servants, who have in fact raised our spiritual condition for us. Others have indeed laboured, and we are entered into their labours. Fifty years ago many might have said, "No one has laboured for us, and where are we?" Nor have we any right to blame the last generation for a state of things which it inherited rather than caused. But the last, or last generation but one of Englishmen,—those with whom the nineteenth century began,—certainly had greatly lost sight of the definite doctrines of the Christian Faith; so much so, that they did not, as a rule, understand, or apply their hearts to understand, the Apostles' Creed. They accepted it, they repeated it, they took it implicitly; but they did not think about all its Articles, they did not feel what it was to them. This was the case, we are told, and we have reason to believe, with a large number of clergy as well as laity. Many earnest and faithful clergy and laity there were, firm in faith, and loving in practice; but they were unseen,

they lived and died in obscurity ; they were no more in sight than Elijah's unknown 7,000 ; they were no more noticed than the action of a healthy heart in a sleeping body. The scandals of neglect and perverted doctrines were too great.

And this was the cause of the Oxford movement, and this gave it all through its chequered course a propelling force which had victory in it ; that a number of men determined to bear better witness to the Universal Christian Faith, and that it should be borne here and elsewhere. Some of us have read one or more of the many late biographies and reminiscences, and accounts of that movement which our late Doctor long headed and restrained. All of them agree in this, that it began as a reaction from a "Noetic" or sceptical school of religious thinking, not happy in itself, and unfortunately connected with a political party. It began in alarm at the discovery that the Christian Faith was not rightly taught, or zealously carried into practice in Oxford, or in England ; and that the English Church was not only in danger of secularization, but partly deserving of it. There was natural alarm, and men rushed hastily to the defence. It is true that many undertook reform of life and doctrine, when they had not yet rightly prepared themselves by learning, when they were not yet well-versed even in Biblical criticism ^a, when they had

^a Mozley, vol. i. p. 175 : "In Michaelmas Term, 1829, Newman, and other Fellows and Probationers, began to meet

not gained patience, experience, and hope from Christian ministry to all classes. They tried to be Church reformers, without due study or discipline. They often did unadvisedly; they wrote, harangued, attempted the impossible, distressed and scandalized their leaders; above all, pressed them forward to claims of influence, which they never would have sought for themselves. Many deserted their leaders, and went to Rome; many in the new movement seemed to forget that there were any faithful Christians in England except themselves. I am old enough, in short, to remember the errors of some later and weaker brethren or children of the movement, without being old enough to have known its true leaders familiarly; and I must say that much of the opposition which it experienced (and which did it very serious injury) arose from the forwardness and self-satisfaction (often, in fact, founded on ignorance) which some of its members displayed. That they did not ruin all was due, under God's good providence, to their having a man at their head who was profoundly learned, indomitable in courage, moral and personal, saintly in life, elo-

twice a-week for the study of Scriptures. The Wesleys and their friends had met so exactly a century before. . . . Secessions in different directions about that time." P. 177: "There was hardly such a thing as Biblical scholarship in the University." Dr. Newman of course possessed it: and nothing can be farther from the mind of the author than to detract from any of his excellencies.

quent in expression, a comforting and inspiriting leader; whose word was his bond; who was emphatically a gentleman of England. The man who best answered that description has just been laid at rest. But it is best not to speak of him as leader of a party; for when a man has done real and great work for the souls of others, his party-work sinks altogether out of the question.

The brook became a river, and the river became a sea. What was a small Bible-meeting of Oxford men fifty years ago has become, not only a great prevailing portion of the Anglican Church, but has leavened the whole Church. Its spirit and its character direct the religious life, and in some measure the daily life, of English Christendom all round the world. It is not too much to say that many who were, and still think themselves, strongly opposed to doctrines which he taught, or to his ways of asserting them, or still more, to the interpretations put on them by impetuous and ignorant followers, are still influenced by his life and teaching; because so much that is good came from him, as to influence men in masses in the first place, and (which is in fact more) to influence and direct the teachers of men. The feeling of what he would think,—not so much of what he would say,—the thought of how he would act under the circumstances, unquestionably ruled men's course for good in many junctures. And there

is no disputing the quiet acceptance of so much of his faith and discipline by almost the whole Church of England, by some who do not know, or like to think, that they are indebted for spiritual good to him or to his. He has died in the Faith, holding the Symbol of the Church of England, as he professed his hope to do, and as those who best knew him trusted with certainty that he would do, as we ourselves may well pray to be enabled to do. It is like the sealing of a great testimony, to which we ourselves are witnesses, to which we also shall set our hands, God helping us.

It is one of our first duties, then, just now, to try to understand, and be grateful for, what has been done for us. For if we do faithfully learn to feel the great goodness of God in anything, we shall learn to know it in everything. Consider the witness borne in this man's life to Jesus Christ our Lord. For one moment let us consider, what does it seem like, to say that the heart and brain, the faith and charity, the spiritual gifts and life's work of Edward Pusey are concourse of atoms and cosmic energies; or that he was evolved out of an ascidian by unlimited time, and the laws of molecular motion? Such statements seem to me to be, before all things, nonsense. But to this you must, in fact, come, if you reject his own account of himself. There is no other or alternative way of accounting for him, except the words he

might himself probably have used: "By the grace of God, I am what I am."

This is one fruit of gratefully considering God's goodness, that it proves His presence to us and with us. Those who honour His faithful ones will follow them; those who have acknowledged His mercies may endure the weight of affliction in their turn, and yet look to him unshaken. But those who have taught and edified us in His Name leave behind them a testimony which we must not let pass. These have all died in faith; perhaps it is part of their reward, certainly it is the thing of all things on earth which they would most have desired us to do, if we gather strength from them to die in faith also.

Other men have laboured for us indeed in the Catholic Church, since the Man Christ Jesus bade His first followers go teach all nations. The greatest life's work is but a life's work; and He is for ever, and His praise is without end. The Universal Church of belief here, and of glory hereafter, has no end. We who hope and toil are connected with those who rejoice and give praise, one with them in Christ. He who passes from us in faith, great or small, wise or simple, known or unknown, passes, as Romans used to say, to a mighty majority of dead in Christ, and finds that the life in Him begun here is not ended but continued. And this is the Faith of the Church of Christ concerning death; and we may end this with the

Apostle's words. They are St. Paul's practical exhortation, after what he has said on the sting of Death, and the victory over Death, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable ; always abounding in the work of the Lord, because ye know your labour is not in vain in the Lord."





